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# WOMEN, GENDER and ENLIGHTENMENT

Edited by  
SARAH KNOTT and BARBARA TAYLOR





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## Reading Rousseau's Sexuality

Robin Howells

On Jean-Jacques Rousseau's personal sexual dispositions there is no shortage of evidence to orient the enquiry, because he tells us about them. Here (as in so much else) he inaugurates modernity. He is historically the first to examine closely his own sexuality, and to perceive it as an essential element of the 'self'. He is also the first to trace his proclivities back to his childhood. More exactly, he is the first to write all this down, in a literary subgenre which he also inaugurates, for the public (eventually) to read – the *Confessions*. The notable section in Book I was composed when he was in his early fifties, around 1765. He had however already projected models of sexuality and sexual relations in his epistolary novel, *Julie, or The New Heloise* (published at the start of 1761). The freedom of fiction allows him to explore and debate the relation of sexuality to desire, virtue, social and metaphysical order. Sexuality is formally theorised, especially in relation to nature, socialisation and imagination, in the latter part of *Emile, or On Education* (published in 1762). In Book 5 of *Emile*, notoriously, he argues that woman is intended to be subordinate to man. Between his theoretical stance and his personal imperatives however there is a considerable tension.

This tension is itself clearly gendered and – so to speak – genred. We have only to look at the titles. *Emile, or On Education* places itself under a male sign, and its subtitle is denotative and abstract. This is philosophy, a masculine domain. *Julie, or The New Heloise* however declares for the female, and the subtitle is connotative and mythical. Novels go with women. Rousseau himself marks this opposition in his account of how as a child he came to self-consciousness. At the age of six or seven he began reading the French romances, such as *Cassandra*, that had belonged to his mother. His other main reading was history, and especially Plutarch's *Lives of Illustrious Men*, which had belonged to her father. (Genre is doubly linked to gender). Strongly identifying with what he reads, he derived from Plutarch what he calls 'Roman pride', from the romances a stimulation to 'tender and expansive sentiments'. Ancient republicanism and love stories were opposed influences. Thus his heart becomes 'both fierce and tender'. His character is 'effeminate and yet unconquerable'. 'Between softness and virtue' he will be, as he puts it, 'perpetually in contradiction with myself'.<sup>1</sup>

The French romances and Plutarch are however alike in depicting the heroism of antiquity.<sup>2</sup> Both belong to what Rousseau will call 'another world'. In the *Dialogues* this becomes 'an ideal world', and we are told that this world is inhabited by 'the author of *Emile* and of *Heloise*'.<sup>3</sup> Both the masculine and feminine models offer an ideal, which Rousseau will oppose to reality. But there is evidently an hierarchy too. Between 'virtue' and 'softness' the valorisation is clear. The former carries approbation, the latter prompts ambivalence. This psychological mechanism is evident in the account of his childhood reading in the *Confessions*. To his grandfather's legacy he attaches moral, social and even metaphysical approval: 'Happily these were worthy books, and it could not have been otherwise, for this library had been formed by a minister of religion'. On the contrary, he reports that his father was 'thoroughly ashamed' to be 'like a child' in his attachment to romances. Rousseau will internalise this shame at regressive desire. *Emile* he will call his greatest and best work. As with his political publications, he attaches to it not only his name but his proud title 'Citizen of Geneva'. It meets the norms – masculine, republican and disciplined – of his superego. His novel, born of more intimate imperatives, caused him acute embarrassment.<sup>4</sup> He explicitly refuses to attach his civic title to it, because it would profane the name of his 'patrie' (*Julie*, Second Preface). But he still puts his own name to it, and defends it passionately.

The gendering of genre is reflected stylistically, it seems to me, in Rousseau's writing as a whole. In the philosophical and political works his style is very 'male'. It is formal and binary, trenchant and end-stopped. However, even that discourse draws on the primal and the corporeal. 'Man is *born* free, and everywhere he is *in chains*' presents an abstract idea through a metaphor of origin and an image of bodily mistreatment. This famous opening sentence of *The Social Contract* is echoed in the opening of *Emile*. There the same absolute opposition is affirmed through a single, more conventional but essentially similar figurative expression: 'All is good *leaving the hands* of the Author of things; all degenerates *in the hands* of man'. In his novel however, and in much of the personal works (*Confessions* and *Reveries*), Rousseau's style becomes flowing and musical. He develops a characteristic vocabulary which is organic. His language seems not sexual but intensely sensual (favouring verbs such as to taste, to suffer, to caress, to take pleasure, to wander, to disfigure).<sup>5</sup> It implies a diffusely eroticised body. It reflects the preference that he himself increasingly affirms for prolonged states of semi-awareness, a return to primary sensibility, receptiveness, dreaming and ecstasy. His writing still sublimates his erotic imperatives but increasingly liberates them. It offers a kind of compensation for his repressive sexual theory, particularly with regard to the feminine. It takes us a long way from the phallic focus.

## Passivity

Central to Rousseau's sexual temperament is his passivity, shading into masochism. In the *Confessions* he identifies his taste for undergoing something

like sexual punishment, which he famously links to a childhood experience. Being spanked on the bottom by his surrogate mother gave him erotic pleasure. 'I found in the pain, even in the shame, an element of sensuality.' The fact of a female hand suggests to the writer that 'there was no doubt present here some precocious sexual instinct'. Mlle Lamercier perceived his reaction on the second occasion and stopped this form of punishment. This episode, says Rousseau, 'decided my tastes, my desires, my passions, myself, for the rest of my life'.<sup>6</sup> He recognises the difficulty of believing that its effect could be so profound – and we would say of course that it revealed and coded rather than determined his disposition. But his formulation also implies, still more remarkably, that the self is sexual.

Rousseau is keen to let us know that he did not actively seek this punishment – not because he did not enjoy it, but because he found it distressing to upset Mlle Lamercier or to lose anyone's goodwill and affection. Here we see the child's anxiety, the writer's need for disculpation (following confession, if not punishment!) and a suggestion of bad faith which Rousseau himself identifies in order to refute it. He completes his account of the episode by noting that it caused a second privation – which we might see as emblematically still more significant. Mlle Lamercier had up till then allowed him and his cousin Abraham to sleep in her room, and on chilly nights even to share her bed. That practice she also promptly ended. From then he was treated by her 'like a big boy'. This, says Rousseau wryly, was an honour which 'I would have readily foregone'.<sup>7</sup>

'Within the terms of psychoanalytic theory,' writes Jean Starobinski, 'it is reasonable to see the whole structure of Rousseau's sexual life, as well as its attendant guilt, in terms of an "infantile fixation" – or even a "pregenital", that is, oral and anal fixation.' One of its principal manifestations is his narcissism.<sup>8</sup> His masochism is another, according to Pierre-Paul Clément, who offers a systematic (and professional) psychoanalytic reading of Rousseau through the writings. Rousseau refuses the Oedipal conflict with the father, protecting his desire to remain one with the mother. He is thus unable to develop object-relations (which would 'normally' fragment and sublimate his desires through negotiations in the real world). Introversion turns his aggression into masochism, his need for wholeness into narcissism.<sup>9</sup> His libido eventually finds satisfaction, argues Clément, through the 'glory' of writing. It is of course that writing itself which enables us to understand so much about Rousseau. His profound awareness of himself is exhibited in the autobiographical works. It is also manifested in the works of imagination, sometimes with startling simplicity. The first work that he wrote was *Narcisse, or The Lover of Himself*. Almost the last, a highly innovative musical drama, was *Pygmalion*, the artist in love with his own creation.

In the *Confessions* Rousseau goes on to observe that his infantile desire leads him to seek 'an imperious mistress'.<sup>10</sup> This preference he also links to 'my timid disposition and my spirit of romance'.<sup>11</sup> The French romances, his earliest reading, showed him heroes submissive to their ladies. The Courtly Love tradition remains very important to Rousseau in offering a cultural form for his desires. Petrarch furnishes the epigraph for *The New Heloise*, which contains a

score of quotations from Italian poetry. (Italian is Rousseau's favourite language, for its musicality and expressivity.)<sup>12</sup> Tasso was Rousseau's favourite poet, his epic romance *Jerusalem Delivered* his favourite work. Courtly love is idealising and neoplatonic within a Christian framework, sublimating sexual desire and eroticising spiritual aspiration. It also links love with death, both as perfect consummation and as sexual peril. It will be given new imaginative realisation in the discourse of Rousseau's novel, which has been described as the last and distinctly bourgeois manifestation of the tradition.<sup>13</sup>

As a youth he was kept virginal, he says, by timidity and idealism, but also through disgust at the idea of sexual congress.<sup>14</sup> He resorted to masturbation, which became a habit. He explains it as the chief resort of those of a shy disposition and a lively imagination, enabling them to have their will of the fair without needing to ask.<sup>15</sup> This auto-satisfaction we can recognise as an expression of what he will increasingly identify as his key disposition: a profound dissatisfaction with reality and preference for his 'other world'. At one level this constitutes regression to the pleasure principle. At another however it satisfies the superego by demonstrating the excellence of his heart. His preference for 'dreams' ('chimères') proves his soul's moral aspiration or platonic knowledge of the good; and it confirms the inferiority of the real world. In terms of his thought, the 'chimera' is in a sense the vision that he always claims to have been the origin of his political writings – the 'illumination of Vincennes'.<sup>16</sup> Its fictional form in its fullest realisation is the world of his novel.<sup>17</sup> Its existential form is what he will call 'reverie'. This dreaming state – passive, regressive and expansive – he will declare to be his essential bent.<sup>18</sup> He will explore it in his last work, entitled *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

There are other factors which seem likely to have affected his sexual disposition. The most obvious is the general repressive and culpabilising influence of Genevan Calvinism. The most complicated is his family situation. Its salient element is the death of his mother at the time of his birth, and what followed. There is the behaviour of his father, which Rousseau reports with filial piety in the *Confessions*. His father would tearfully and convulsively embrace him, moaning 'Bring her back to me, console me for her loss!'.<sup>19</sup> To us it seems fairly evident that such treatment would tend to eroticise, feminise and culpabilise the self-imagination of the child. Secondly there is the relation with his elder brother. François had been born seven years previously, and raised by his mother (the father having been long absent between the two events). In the *Confessions* Rousseau recognises that his own advent on the scene was to the detriment of his brother. His brother's increasing misconduct prompted physical chastisement by his father, and Rousseau claims to have once flung himself upon his brother protectively and taken the blows himself.<sup>20</sup> What we have just suggested about the effect of the father's embraces – feminising and culpabilising him – would seem to apply also to his 'good' role *vis-à-vis* the 'bad' brother. We perceive too the rivalry for parental affection (and perhaps, given Rousseau's subsequent avowal, for parental punishment). Finally there is the relationship of each of the couples who serve as his surrogate parents. Jean-Jacques was raised first by his

father and his father's sister. Then – his father having found it necessary to quit Geneva (again) – he was sent to live with the minister Lambercier and his sister Mlle Lambercier. Thus the child's paradigm is that of father and mother who are also brother and sister.<sup>21</sup> Polymorphous affective relations will characterise Rousseau's novel.

The *Confessions* adduces several episodes which gave the young Jean-Jacques something of the experience of sexual submission that he desired. It was provided physically by playing school with little Mlle Goton as the teacher, during which she seems to have assaulted him sexually but forbidden reciprocation. Its most sublimated version is that of the 'day of the cherries', during which he enacts chivalric and pastoral relations with two young noblewomen.<sup>22</sup> The most dramatic is the episode of self-exposure in Turin. The adolescent, abroad and lonely, exhibits his bottom to women. The gesture is explained by Rousseau as a request for female punishment. But beneath that we should surely perceive what would today be called 'a cry for help', and specifically a plea to be mothered. He is unexpectedly caught and threatened by 'a big man, with a big moustache, [...] and a big sabre' and older women with broom-handles.<sup>23</sup> The man with the large weapon evidently represents the father who avenges and castrates; the detail of the women equipped with broom-handles suggests the fantasy of being penetrated as well.

Telling us about his improper sexuality is itself exhibitionist. It too is self-inculpation, a request for punishment and a plea for understanding. And all this is implicit in his choice of title – *Confessions*. Culturally, all his writings can be perceived as passive exhibitionism. From the start, even the most philosophical works draw attention to the persona of the writer; and even the most dangerous display on the title-page his name. They exhibit his vision, his truth, his self-witness. Provocatively they demand recognition. His insistent challenging of society's norms – French high civilisation, monarchy and church; the Enlightenment and the 'philosophes'; even and especially Geneva itself – demands and tests love, and eventually succeeds in prompting persecution from all these quarters.

\* \* \*

The relationship at once filial and sensual that Rousseau seeks is provided by Mme de Warens. Aged sixteen, having run away from Geneva, he is directed to a lady of Catholic charity. She turns out to be a pretty and buxom blonde only twelve years his senior. She takes him into her house, and soon becomes 'Maman' to his 'Petit'. Eventually however she also decides to take him into her bed. Rousseau himself tells us that he did not want this, feeling – understandably – that it was a kind of incest.<sup>24</sup> He also realises that he is sharing her with her steward Claude Anet. The grave steward is himself a father-figure for the young man.<sup>25</sup> Indeed Rousseau sees Anet as also playing that role for Mme de Warens, and for the two of them: 'he regarded us almost as two children deserving indulgence'. On the same page he assigns to her the central role, that of



an expansive tenderness. He continues: 'thus was established between the three of us a society perhaps unique on earth'.<sup>26</sup> This ideal constitutes not only a *ménage à trois* but a blend of authority and tenderness, and a pattern of erotic relations (justified by the structure of moral affection) intertwined with those perceived as familial. Loving triangles will recur in his fiction and (with Sophie d'Houdetot and Saint-Lambert) his life.

Rousseau however falls ill, rather mysteriously. It is tempting to see this protracted illness as a means of evading the sexual demands of 'Maman'. Better, it requires her to nurse him. He becomes thereby, in his own formulation, 'entirely her creation, entirely her child and more so than if she had been my real mother'.<sup>27</sup> Passivity enables him to avoid what he does not want. Its regressive form provides him with what he does want. He finds his state of illness quite pleasurable (as he recognises in his account in Book 5 of the *Confessions*). Giving him calm, suggesting death, it is a kind of spiritualisation. But it also legitimises his attention to his body, intensifying his sensual experience of himself. In fact Rousseau claimed to have suffered from another malady since birth. He presents it as a malformation or blockage of the urethra, which caused him difficulty in urinating. Its symptoms fluctuated, and at various times he had recourse to probes, which he would sometimes administer himself. One hardly needs to be a Freudian, in the contexts that we have noted, to see psycho-sexual significance in the location, nature and treatment of this malady.<sup>28</sup>

## Homo-eroticism

Rousseau's passivity, and indeed his masochism, seem to be reflected also in a homo-erotic tendency.<sup>29</sup> In the *Confessions* he himself readily recognises the fascination exerted upon him by a series of men (Bâcle in Turin, Venture de Villeneuve in Annecy, Altuna in Paris). More interestingly suggestive however are two childhood episodes that he mentions – to admire himself – in the *Reveries*. In each, Jean-Jacques by accident suffers a bodily wound from another boy, but will not accuse him, and wins love. The first lad embraces him and tearfully begs Jean-Jacques not to tell.<sup>30</sup> The other event, in Rousseau's account, is still more intense. Again he receives corporeal hurt; again his blood flows freely. In this second case the boy

flings himself upon me, embraces me, holds me tightly while bursting into tears and uttering piercing cries. I too embraced him with all my strength, weeping like him with a confused emotion which was not without a little sweetness.

Following this union, the injured Jean-Jacques is taken by the boy to his mother who bathes his wound. 'Her tears and those of her son so penetrated my heart that for some time I thought of her as my mother and of her son as my brother.'<sup>31</sup> Rousseau himself identifies the meaning of the latter part of the second episode, with startling and quite moving simplicity. He is looking for a

family and ultimately a mother. We can see how, as with Mme de Warens, bodily suffering is the means of getting a woman to nurse him. Here however the transaction – as in the first case – is essentially male. We have not ‘softness’ but acts of violent wounding (Jean-Jacques is still the passive party), courage, and ethical self-sacrifice, to establish a passionate same-sex relationship.<sup>32</sup> Combined here, and moralised, are the desire for physical violation and for male bonding.

Rousseau’s masochistic male scenario undoubtedly had its cultural models. One is Plutarch’s *Illustrious Men*. In fact Rousseau early in the *Confessions* recounts how as a child he was so moved by Plutarch’s stories of stoic heroism that he offered in imitation of Scaevola to place his hand on a hot stove (bodily extremities, hard surfaces, pain and martyrdom, again). Plutarch means most notably the idealisation of Sparta, not only as the example of collective republican virtue (repeatedly celebrated as such in Rousseau’s political works) but of exemplary individual acts of endurance. Sparta proverbially is the boy so brave that he would not cry out when a fox was gnawing at his vitals. No less proverbially it is youths wrestling nude, a practice that not only assists their strength and purity physically but demonstrates it morally. Rousseau is presumably alluding to this Spartan practice when he affirms in his earliest political work that ‘the man of worth gladly enters the struggle naked’.<sup>33</sup> His image of male virtue here seems to me an expression, scarcely sublimated, of homo-erotic hysteria.

This leads us to the second cultural model. Epic and romance, in their more refined versions, offered an erotics of death in combat. In Virgil’s *Aeneid* the account can be quite orgasmic. Handsome young warriors, their bodies mortally penetrated by the enemy blade, spurt, droop and die. Perhaps the most remarkable example: ‘The sword, forced strongly home, pressed through the ribs of Euryalus and burst his white breast; he rolled writhing in death, the blood spread over his lovely limbs, and his neck, relaxing, sank on his shoulder. He was like a bright flower shorn by the plough, languishing and dying’.<sup>34</sup> Gender ambiguity becomes explicit in the case of Camilla the warrior woman. Her death in battle, having herself killed many men, is the more erotic in its contrast: ‘The shaft found its mark under her bared breast, and there stayed fixed, forced deeply home to drink of a maiden’s blood’ (Book 11). Fénelon’s didactic prose epic *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1699), which takes much from Virgil, was one of Rousseau’s favourite books. The image of the dying warrior as wilting flower – well suited to Fénelon’s sensually platonising style – recurs there.<sup>35</sup>

Rousseau’s favourite among all fictional works, indebted likewise to Virgil, is Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered* (c.1575).<sup>36</sup> In Tasso the struggle to conquer is Christianised and romanced, so that the crusader brotherhood besieging Jerusalem are in peril less from pagan knights than from pagan ladies. One of the latter is duly a warrior woman. Tancred discovers that the opposing champion whom he has mortally wounded is Clorinda whom he loves. Death is eroticised in this way, then culpabilised and spiritualised as he curses himself after baptising her while she breathes her last (Book 12). Earlier Clorinda in full armour had saved from a fiery fate the beautiful Christian virgin Sophronia and her devoted lover Olindo, who had volunteered to be lashed to the stake and burned with her (Book 2).

Rousseau himself wrote a translation of opening segments of the *Gerusalemme*, including much of the episode which he calls 'Olinde et Sophronie'. The youth he evidently sees as a version of himself ('he desires much, hopes little, asks nothing'). Olinde is glad to savour the sweet pain ("How delicious the torments will be!"), as he is bound body-to-body with his beloved on the pyre.<sup>37</sup> Rousseau's translation ends (in mid-Book) at this moment: armoured womanhood rescuing from exquisite death a virgin and her twin who is Jean-Jacques with a name ('Olinde') which is curiously feminine.

Our reading is in effect confirmed by the fact that Rousseau quotes from this section of Tasso's poem in his account of his own boyhood martyrdoms in the *Reveries* (cited above). An episode very similar to that of Olinde and Sophronie occurs at the end of Rousseau's *Levite of Ephraïm*. The *Levite*, reworking a story in the Old Testament, deals in displaced homosexual gang rape and mass slaughter. Students of Rousseau's *imaginaire* have understandably given it considerable attention in recent years.<sup>38</sup> But here we must leave it aside, turning instead to his fictional masterpiece.

### *Julie, or The New Heloise*

Rousseau himself will recount to us, in Book 9 of the *Confessions*, the fantasmic origins of his novel. Feeling a great need to love, he says, I did just what my reader will have learned by now to expect.

The impossibility of attaining real beings flung me into the land of dreams, and seeing nothing in existence which was worthy of my delirium, I nourished it with an ideal world that my creative imagination soon populated with creatures after my own heart.<sup>39</sup>

A second stage brings him (as he puts it) a little closer to earth:

I imagined love and friendship, the two idols of my heart, in the most ravishing forms. [...] I imagined two friends who were women rather than men [...]. I bestowed on one a lover of whom the other was the tender friend and even something more, but I admitted no rivalry, quarreling or jealousy, because all painful feelings distress me to imagine, and I did not wish to darken this smiling picture with anything which degraded nature. Smitten by my two charming models, I identified myself with the lover and friend as much as possible.

Seeking an appropriate location for them, he continues, he needed a lake. He chooses the great water of his own origins, Lake Geneva, and on its edge the little town of Vevey, the place of origin of 'Maman'.<sup>40</sup> As primal locations, liquid and mother are themselves of course profoundly linked. I shall come back to this. But let us begin with the affective pattern that Rousseau has just outlined.

It is clear that his ideal dream brings together sexual love, heterosexual friendship (with 'even something more'), and same-sex friendship – and binds them

still closer by excluding interpersonal conflict. The young women, Julie and Claire, will also be cousins, adding another and familial strand to the bonds. The young man, the 'lover and friend' completing the triangle, is a version of himself. This may be why we are never told his name; but he is given a chivalric pseudonym, Saint-Preux. Slightly older than the cousins, and Julie's tutor, he is their superior; but he is a plebeian guest in her noble household, which makes her his lady in that sense too. Thus these relations too are complementary and to some extent reversible. The novel will be epistolary (in the fashion of the time, and perhaps in imitation of the letters of Eloisa and Abelard, the medievalising metatext of spiritualised passion announced in the title), but it is interesting that Rousseau in his account of its creation never gives a reason for this choice. It means that Rousseau is writing letters of love and friendship, in the personae of both sexes (yet in a style that scarcely differentiates them), to himself.

His avowed self-projection within the fiction, Saint-Preux, can also mirror himself by writing. Saint-Preux makes the first utterance, by letter (though he sees its addressee every day). It announces to Julie the forbidden declaration of love, offering to die should she so command, and asking only to be read.<sup>41</sup> Passively he exhibits his love and self, for punishment and recognition. Julie, eventually overwhelmed by his writing, avows by letter her own love. He asks her to make all the decisions for them both (Part I, Letter 12). But his tranquillity is disturbed – according to his own account – when she takes the first sexual initiative (I, 14). She then banishes him from her presence, which leaves him free to fantasise about her. His imagination dwells upon her breasts, which he celebrates by quoting lines from Tasso (about the half-seen breast of a pagan enchantress), and evoking a classical cup (I, 23).

Julie's body, like everything else about her, is elegant. Rousseau is an aesthete. His desire requires refinement, as he himself recognises. 'I needed young ladies' offers within the *Confessions* a suggestive parallel to 'I needed a lake'. What appeals to him in a woman, he says, is refinement – and he lists items of female apparel with an attention both feminine and voyeuristic.<sup>42</sup> Rousseau dreams of men as naked athletes; women he wants elegantly dressed or *en déshabillé*, partially revealed so as to provoke the imagination. But Julie's breast is also compared to a cup. Rousseau has her propose to Saint-Preux a rural rendez-vous at a chalet known only to 'fresh and discreet milkmaids', free from mankind and 'under the tender care of Mother Nature'.<sup>43</sup> Its rectified equivalent in the second half of the novel is the 'Gynécée' or nursery at Clarens, where one consumes 'dishes to the taste of women and children'. Men are excluded, even Julie's husband; but Saint-Preux through his insistent demands is admitted. The milk-products, he says, were delicious, and still more so in a dairy where Julie presides!<sup>44</sup> Regressive desire – the exclusion of male sexuality, and the infantile-oral wish for the mother's breast – could scarcely be affirmed more clearly.

Saint-Preux, in a word, wants to remain Julie's child. In the first half of the novel he is received for love by Julie d'Etange (and her mother) into her first family; but he is expelled by the arrival on the scene of her father. In the second half of the novel he is received for social order by Julie de Wolmar (now a

mother) into her second family, under the tutelage of her husband who is to help him to achieve maturity. But he is deeply ambivalent about becoming one of the adults. As he writes (on behalf surely of his creator), 'I feel greater pleasure still in seeing myself as the child of the household'.<sup>45</sup> He never really wanted Julie sexually. It was she who wanted him in that way. He wanted a mother. His first letter to Julie begins 'I must flee from you, Mademoiselle'. His last includes a formula in which the truth is made astonishingly explicit: 'When that fearsome Julie pursues me, I take refuge with Madame de Wolmar and I am at peace'.<sup>46</sup> The love that he wants most is maternal.

Saint-Preux also wants a love that is fraternal. His surrogate brother is milord Edouard – Rousseau's fantasy English companion: aristocratic, stern but passionate. Edouard will rescue him from Julie's sexual demands by carrying off the fainting tutor in his strong phallic arm and a carriage. 'In an instant,' writes Claire (enviously?), 'he bore him with a powerful arm into the chaise, and they departed closely embracing'.<sup>47</sup> In the second half of the novel Saint-Preux will return the favour by prising Edouard free from the clutches of two scarlet women – the doubles surely of Julie and Claire who pursue Saint-Preux. As Julie is to be his loving mother, Claire is to be his loving sister. But none of these roles is exclusive: Edouard is his twin and also his elder brother; Claire is to be his mother too, and Julie his sister. He addresses Julie as 'my charming mistress, my spouse, my sister, my sweet friend' (I, 55); Claire tells her 'your lover is my friend, that is, my brother' (II, 5). Implicit is a wish to return to the state that Freud calls polymorphous perversity.

Forbidding the regressive desire to merge however is the father. The rectified father (for Julie as well as Saint-Preux) will be Wolmar, in the second half of the novel. The real father is the terrible Baron d'Etange. Julie's father is the Father: the master of the house and the horde, the patriarch and philanderer, towards whom they all feel awe and guilt.<sup>48</sup> The Baron pronounces the 'Non du père': he expels the claimant to his daughter, causes the death of his wife ('her husband alone is to blame': III, 7), kills the tutor's child in the womb of the daughter (I, 63), and marries her to his own choice. Oedipus rises in the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Or rather he censors his desire to rise. Indeed, to declare Julie the new Heloise makes Saint-Preux another Abelard. Rousseau, through his surrogate, castrates himself rather than confront the Father. Or rather, his guilty Eros is sublimated into the glorious Eros of writing.

## Flow

Rousseau is drawn to the feminine principle of water and flow. In his more mythic account of the origins of man, water is the primal and generative element. The first meeting-places of humanity were rivers, springs and wells.<sup>50</sup> Water in flow and repose is perhaps the fundamental symbolic principle of his novel. A true loveletter, he says in the Second Preface, is 'like a living spring which flows without cease and never runs dry'. Persuasive speech is flow. Life forever with Julie would be flow.<sup>51</sup> Julie is from still water (Julie d'Etange – 'étang'

means pond), and returns to her element when her immersion in the lake brings about her death.<sup>52</sup> All these of course are statements about Rousseau's own writing (the letters, the persuasive utterance, the novel called *Julie*) in which we are to immerse ourselves as it flows.

The act of writing itself is for Rousseau a whole erotics. Saint-Preux within the fiction copies out Julie's letters, substitute for herself, making of them a precious book (II, 13). So does Rousseau the maker of the fiction, copying out his own composition 'with an inexpressible pleasure, using the finest gilt paper'.<sup>53</sup> To copy is to reproduce the same – erotics as auto-erotics. Saint-Preux indeed saves for the evenings 'this charming occupation' and 'advances slowly so as to prolong it'.<sup>54</sup> The flow of ink is controlled by his hand; the flow of words is drawn from Rousseau's creation Julie and Julie's creator Rousseau. The manu-script, unlike the woman, remains theirs. Julie the woman must die so that *Julie* the book can be written. Rousseau's last work, the *Reveries*, will be composed explicitly for himself. By then he must rely more on memory than imagination for his 'charming contemplations'; but the principle is the same. 'Writing fixes those which may still come to me; each time I reread them will offer me jouissance.'<sup>55</sup>

However self-abuse can lead to death (as Saint-Preux needs to be warned by Julie: *Heloise*, II, 15). Emile adolescent must be watched day and night. 'If he ever discovers this dangerous supplement, he is doomed. Henceforth his body and soul will be forever enfeebled.'<sup>56</sup> Sophie is told that she could kill Emile by allowing him too much sexual intercourse or too little. It's women who really want it, and they wear men out.<sup>57</sup> This fear must be an element in Rousseau's dream of autarchy. All the outlets and inlets have to be blocked, in order to prevent wear and waste. 'None of these exchanges occurs without loss, and such repeated losses reduce to almost nothing quite considerable resources'.<sup>58</sup> The ideal (e)state is self-complete: Emile's state, the Wolmar estate at Clarens, the city-state of *Du contrat social*. Perhaps this is also the state represented by each clean-limbed male, the state of Rousseau's philosophic desire. His more intimate desire is represented in his novel, in which Clarens though admirable fails to satisfy. Julie dying gladly looks forward to the infinite, and back to her first love.<sup>59</sup> Saint-Preux will not grow up. Rousseau's more intimate desire is in its character feminine, receptive and expansive – to return to nature, water and the mother.

## Notes

1. *Confessions*, CW5.7–11; *Dialogues*, CW1.123. References are to *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover and London: New England University Press, 1990– ), by volume and page-number(s). I also give references to the authoritative French edition of Rousseau's *Œuvres complètes*, in the *Pléiade* (5 vols; Paris: Gallimard, 1959–95), especially when supplying the French text (modernised) in notes. The translations here, attempting to convey the quality as well as the sense of Rousseau's writing, are usually my own.
2. Plutarch presents the austere republican heroes of Sparta and Rome; the romances of La Calprenède or Mme de Scudéry (fiction mostly set in ancient times) feature Alexander and Cyrus, Cleopatra and Clelia. On the continuing cultural significance of the seventeenth-century French romances even in mid-eighteenth-century England,

see Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Oxford UP, 1970), 'Introduction' (and text!).

3. 'Un autre monde'; 'un monde idéal': CW1.9 and 13; *Pléiade* i, pp. 668, 673.
4. 'My great embarrassment was the shame of giving myself the lie so evidently and publicly. After the severe principles that I had just declared [...] against effeminate books which breathed love and softness [...] which I had so harshly censored' (*Confessions* Book 9: CW5.365; *Pléiade* i, p. 434).
5. 'Goûter', 'souffrir', 'caresser', 'jouir', 'errer', 'défigurer'. Rousseau's language itself is composed to be tasted and undergone, lingered over and savoured.
6. 'J'avais trouvé dans la douleur, dans la honte même, un mélange de sensualité'; 'il se mêlait sans doute à cela quelque instinct précoce du sexe'; 'ce châtement d'enfant [...] a décidé de mes goûts, de mes désirs, de mes passions, de moi, pour le reste de ma vie': CW5.13; *Pléiade* i, p. 15.
7. 'J'eus désormais l'honneur, dont je me serais bien passé, d'être traité par elle en grand garçon': *loc.cit.*
8. Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: transparency and obstruction*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1988) p. 394.
9. Pierre-Paul Clément, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau. De l'Eros coupable à l'éros glorieux* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1976). For perhaps the clearest summary, see pp. 100-101. The broad outlines of this view of Rousseau's sexuality – infantile, narcissistic and masochistic – underly a number of recent books. These include Paule Adamy, *Les Corps de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Champion, 1997); the psychoanalytic reading of Rousseau's religion by Michel Coz, *La Cène et l'Autre Scène: Désir et profession de foi chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Champion, 1998); and the account of Rousseau's novel by Elena Pulcini, *Amour-passion et amour conjugal. Rousseau et l'origine d'un conflit moderne* (Paris: Champion, 1998). He is seen as both submissive to the father and challenging the 'fathers' of society in Claire Elmquist, *Rousseau père et fils* (Odense UP, 1996); and in the more tragic reading by Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). More clearly against the regressive psychoanalytical account are several recent studies which argue for Rousseau's philosophical importance in recognising the role of sexuality in politics. These include Penny A. Weiss, *Gendered Communities: Rousseau, Sex, and Politics* (New York UP, 1993); Margaret Ogrodnick, *Instinct and Intimacy: Political Philosophy and Autobiography in Rousseau* (University of Toronto Press, 1999); and – most remarkably, to my mind – Elizabeth Rose Wingrove, *Rousseau's Republican Romance* (Princeton UP, 2000). The struggle over Rousseau within North American feminist scholarship is evidenced by another dozen recent American books and articles listed in Wingrove's bibliography. Noting the provenance and language of these contrasting approaches – French and American – it seems that we are dealing with two rather different academics.
10. 'N'osant jamais déclarer mon goût, je l'amusais [I occupied it] du moins par des rapports qui m'en conservaient l'idée. Etre aux genoux d'une maîtresse impérieuse, obéir à ses ordres, avoir des pardons à lui demander, étaient pour moi de très douces jouissances, et plus ma vive imagination m'enflammait le sang, plus j'avais l'air d'un amant transi [a swooning suitor].' CW5.15; *Pléiade* i, p. 17.
11. 'Mon humeur timide et mon esprit romanesque': *loc.cit.*
12. It has been nicely observed that as *Julie* deals in Italian quotation, so *Emile* deals in quotations from Latin, 'the virile language' – except in the story of *Emile* and *Sophie* where the Italian poets duly take over. See Françoise Bocquentin, 'Comment lire J.-J. Rousseau selon J.-J. Rousseau?', in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la lecture*, ed. Tanguy L'Aminot (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999), 329-49 (p. 335).
13. See Denis de Rougemont's great historical study of Courtly Love, translated as *Love in the Western World (or Passion and Society)* (tr. Monty Belgion; New York: Pantheon, 1956). See too the Introduction to Pulcini, *Amour-passion*.

14. He was sickened by the sight of bitches [sic: 'des chiennes'] coupling, and by seeing holes in the earth where he was told that whores and debauchees did the same ['des cavités dans la terre où l'on me dit que ces gens-là faisaient leurs accouplements']: CW5.14; *Pléiade* i, p. 16. Horror of the female 'hole' is surely implicit.
15. 'Ce vice, que la honte et la timidité trouvent si commode, a de plus un grand attrait pour les imaginations vives: c'est de disposer pour ainsi dire à leur gré de tout le sexe [...] sans avoir besoin d'obtenir son aveu': CW5.91; *Pléiade* i, p. 109.
16. Rousseau's accounts of the 'illumination' that he experienced in 1749 on the road to Vincennes can be found in CW5.294–5, 575, and CW8.20; *Pléiade* i, pp. 351, 1015, 1135–6.
17. For Rousseau 'utopias were genuine portraits of the human heart', as Judith Shklar nicely puts it, embracing the aspirational, philosophical and fictional dimensions of his writing: *Men and Citizens: a Study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (Cambridge UP, 1969), p. 8.
18. CW1.123, 153–4, and CW5.577–9; *Pléiade* i, pp. 817, 857–8, 1138–42.
19. 'Jamais il ne m'embrassa que je ne sentisse à ses soupirs, à ses convulsives étreintes, qu'un regret amer se mêlait à ses caresses'; "'Ah", disait-il en gémissant, "Rends-la-moi, console-moi d'elle"': CW5.7; *Pléiade* i, p. 7.
20. 'Une fois que mon père le châtoyait rudement et avec colère, je me jettai impétueusement entre deux l'embrassant étroitement. Je le couvris ainsi de mon corps recevant les coups qui lui étaient portés': CW5.9; *Pléiade* i, pp. 9–10.
21. It seems that the minister and his sister had actually been accused of improper intimacies: see Clément, *De l'Eros coupable*, p. 60, note 36; Coz, *La Cène*, p. 36. But Jean-Jacques is unlikely to have known that. Our concern anyway is less with the putative 'facts' than with the sexual *imaginaire* – as in our reading of the text of the *Confessions* itself.
22. On games with Mlle Goton, and on the idyllic 'journée des cerises', see respectively CW5.23, 113–16; *Pléiade* i, pp. 27, 134–9.
23. 'Je fus atteint et saisi par un grand homme portant une grande moustache, [...], un grand sabre': CW5.74–5; *Pléiade* i, p. 89.
24. 'J'étais comme si j'avais commis un inceste': CW5.165; *Pléiade* i, p. 197.
25. 'As he was serious, even grave, and I was younger than him, he became for me a kind of tutor ['gouverneur'], saving me from many follies; for he overawed me and I dared not forget myself before him ['car il m'en imposait, et je n'osais m'oublier devant lui]': CW5.149; *Pléiade* i, p. 177.
26. 'Il nous regardait presque comme deux enfants dignes d'indulgence'; 'Combien de fois elle attendrit nos cœurs et nous fit embrasser avec larmes'; 'Ainsi il s'établit entre nous trois une société sans autre exemple peut-être sur la terre': CW5.169; *Pléiade* i, p. 201.
27. 'Je devenais tout à fait son œuvre, tout à fait son enfant et plus que si elle eût été ma vraie mère': CW5.186; *Pléiade* i, p. 222. The interpretation of his illness is proposed in the *Pléiade* edition, p. 218, note 6.
28. See Starobinski, *Transparency*, 'On Rousseau's illness' (an essay first published in 1962); Clément, *De l'Eros coupable*, ch. 19, 'L'Etrange maladie'; Adamy, *Les Corps*, ch. 13, 'Le corps persécuté'.
29. Other critics who perceive a sexual bivalence in Rousseau argue for an essential homosexuality (Adamy, *Les Corps*), or – more persuasively – point to a dream of hermaphroditism which is also of autarchy (Clément, *De l'Eros coupable*, ch. 20; Joel Schwartz, *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago UP, 1984), ch. 4; Robert J. Ellrich, 'Rousseau's androgynous dream: the minor works of 1752–62', *French Forum* 13 (1988), 319–38). I am using the term 'homo-eroticism' to signify the male subject's susceptibility to sexual arousal by masculine qualities (or secondarily by perceiving an attraction of the same between females).
30. The boy had accidentally crushed Jean-Jacques's finger-ends between two metal rollers, Jean-Jacques having felt 'tempted to place my fingers there and running them pleasur-



ably over the smooth surface of the cylinder' ['je fus tenté d'y poser mes doigts et je les promenais avec plaisir sur le lissé du cylindre'] (CW8.38; Pléiade i, p. 1036). Hands, tempting surfaces, touching, metal, pleasure, pain. ... There seems to be a link (the right word) between Rousseau's infantile eroticism and the opening sentences of the *Social Contract* and *Emile*, quoted above. Does the desire to return to the sensual mother underly both?

31. '[...] je l'embrassais aussi de toute ma force en pleurant comme lui dans une émotion confuse qui n'était pas sans quelque douceur.' '[...] longtemps je la regardai comme ma mère et son fils comme mon frère' CW8.38-9; Pléiade i, p. 1037.
32. The two events recounted here are in effect episodic versions of the relationship that Rousseau represents as having existed throughout his boyhood between himself and Abraham Bernard, his companion, occasional bedfellow and (real) cousin, whom he loved 'more than my brother': *Confessions*, CW5.11ff.; Pléiade i, pp. 13ff. We noted earlier the story of blows and affection shared with (or claimed from) his real brother.
33. 'l'homme de bien est un athlète qui se plaît à combattre nu': CW2.6; Pléiade iii, p. 8.
34. In this instance the context too is of some interest in relation to Rousseau. Euryalus is devoted to the beautiful Nisus, with whom he goes on a daring night raid. When Nisus sees his boon companion captured by the enemy and about to be dispatched, he tries to save him by crying out "All the fault is mine" (*Aeneid*, Book 9; tr. W. F. Jackson Knight; Penguin, 1956).
35. For example, in Books 13 and 15, pp. 363, 370, 429, 431, of *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, ed. Jeanne-Lydie Goré (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1968). Fénelon's fiction (itself derived from the opening of the *Odyssey*), is explicitly the metatext for the story of Emile and Sophie in the last Book of *Emile*.
36. On Rousseau and Tasso, see the avowal of his passion in the *Confessions*, CW5.247; Pléiade i, p. 294 and note 9; Pléiade v, pp. ccii-v; and Jean Starobinski, 'L'imitation du Tasse', *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 40 (1992), 265-88.
37. 'Il désire beaucoup, espère peu, ne demande rien'; "Que les tourments me seront délicieux": Pléiade v, pp. 1289-92. (Rousseau's translation of Tasso is not available in English.)
38. See notably the more psychological account offered in Kavanagh, *Writing the Truth*, ch. 5, and the 'engaged' reading in Wingrove, *Rousseau's Republican Romance* (ch. 6), which I find less persuasive. To my mind, Rousseau contrives to allow both his surrogates in the narrative – the Levite and Elmacin – to eschew politics as well as sexual relations with their (female) betrothed, in favour of suffering. See my article, 'Rousseau's fictions of sacrifice', *SVEC* 2003.07, 271-91.
39. 'L'impossibilité d'atteindre aux êtres réels me jeta dans le pays des chimères, et ne voyant rien d'existant qui fût digne de mon délire, je le nourris dans un monde idéal que mon imagination créatrice eut bientôt peuplé d'êtres selon mon cœur': CW5.359; Pléiade i, p. 427.
40. 'Epris de mes deux charmants modèles, je m'identifiais avec l'amant et l'ami le plus qu'il m'était possible'. 'Pour placer mes personnages dans un séjour qui leur convînt, [...] Il me fallait cependant un lac'. CW5.361-2; Pléiade i, pp. 430-1.
41. '[...] périr par votre ordre [...]'. 'Si vous avez lu cette lettre, vous avez fait tout ce que j'oserais vous demander': Part I, Letter 1.
42. 'Il me fallait des demoiselles'; 'une robe plus fine et mieux faite, une chaussure plus mignonne, des rubans, de la dentelle': CW5.113; Pléiade i, p. 134.
43. 'Les fraîches et discrètes laitières'; 'l'art ni la main des hommes n'y montrent nulle part leurs soins inquiétants; on n'y voit partout que les tendres soins de la Mère commune': I, 36.
44. 'J'obtiens à force d'importunités de l'y accompagner'; 'Est-il quelques mets au monde comparables aux laitages de ce pays? Pensez ce que doivent être ceux d'une laiterie où Julie préside': IV, 10.
45. 'Je sens plus de plaisir encore à me regarder comme l'enfant de la maison': V, 2.

46. 'Il faut vous fuir, mademoiselle' (I, 1); 'Quand cette redoutable Julie me poursuit, je me réfugie auprès de madame de Wolmar, et je suis tranquille': VI, 7.
47. 'A l'instant il l'a porté d'un bras vigoureux dans la chaise, et ils sont partis en se tenant étroitement embrassés': I, 65.
48. For this reading, see Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979), ch.2, 'La Nouvelle Héloïse'.
49. The clearest manifestation of the Œdipus complex is the sentiment of guilt towards the father: see Paul Pelckmans, *Le Sacre du père: Fictions des Lumières et historicité d'Œdipe (1699-1775)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1983). The argument that Freud's model of family relations is less a universal than a product of the rise of the bourgeois sentimental family has been proposed by a number of cultural historians: for a recent presentation, see Charlotte Daniels, *Subverting the Family Romance* (Lewisburg and London: Bucknell University Press, 2000).
50. *Essay on the Origin of Languages*: CW7.310-15; Pléiade v, pp. 400-5. On Rousseau and water, see the archetypal study by Monique Anne Gyalokay, *Rousseau, Northrop Frye et la Bible* (Paris: Champion, 1999), ch. 3.
51. 'Une lettre d'un amant vraiment passionné sera [...] comme une source vive qui coule sans cesse et ne s'épuise jamais'; 'cette douce persuasion qui coule de sa bouche'; 'O ma Julie! [...] que ne puis-je couler mes jours avec toi': *The New Heloise*, Second Preface; V, 5; I, 23.
52. Her married name is 'Wolmar', which might suggest 'veut la mer' ('wants water') – or 'veut la mère' for Saint-Preux. Water indeed represents the negation of her married and social condition. Claire reminds her (for our benefit) that she loves boating but denies herself because her husband dislikes water, and her children might be exposed to danger: IV, 13.
53. 'Je [le] fis et mis au net durant cet hiver avec un plaisir inexprimable, employant pour cela le plus beau papier doré, de la poudre d'or et d'azur pour sécher l'écriture, [...]' (*Confessions* 9: CW5.367; Pléiade i, p. 436.)
54. 'Je destine les soirées à cette occupation charmante, et j'avancerais lentement pour la prolonger' (II, 15).
55. 'Je fixerais par l'écriture celles qui pourront me venir encore; chaque fois que je les relirai m'en rendra la jouissance': CW8.7; Pléiade, i, p. 999. 'Jouissance' like 'jouir' had (and still has) a specifically erotic meaning in French. There is no adequate English equivalent. See Victor Reinking, 'Rousseau's bliss: jouissances', *SVEC* 332 (1995), 335-48.
56. 'Ne le laissez seul ni jour ni nuit [...]. S'il connaît une fois ce dangereux supplément, il est perdu. Dès lors il aura toujours le corps et le cœur éternels [...]' *Emile*: trans. and ed. Allan Bloom (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1991), pp. 333-4; Pléiade iv, p. 663.
57. See *Emile* Book 5: ed. Bloom, pp. 359, 369, 428, 477-9; Pléiade iv, pp. 695, 709, 795, 863-6.
58. 'Aucun de ces échanges ne se fait sans perte, et ces pertes multipliées réduisent presque à rien d'assez grands moyens': *Héloïse*, V, 2.
59. 'The first sentiment that gave me life' ['le premier sentiment qui m'a fait vivre']: *Héloïse*, VI, 12.